



Thinking About Our Future: Latino Teens Speak Out about Teen Pregnancy



Did you know that...

53%

of Latina teens become pregnant at least once before turning 20.

Latina teens have the **highest** teen pregnancy and birth rates among all racial and ethnic groups.

69%

of Latina teen moms drop out of high school.

Latino teens, boys and girls, are **less likely** to use contraception compared to their peers.

Nearly 80%

of teen moms never marry the father of their baby.

Fewer than

8% of teen moms marry their baby's father within one year after giving birth.

A baby born to a teen mom who has not finished high school and is not married is

nine times more likely

to be poor than a baby born to an adult who has finished high school and is married.

The average cost of taking care of a child during its first year is

\$11,000.

One out of four

teen girls has a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

Many STDs

do not have a cure.

25%

of people living with HIV in the United States do not even know they are infected.

"The most important word of advice is to think about your future...it's all about your future."

- Girl, 17

Strange as it may seem, when it comes to relationships, sex, contraception, and teen pregnancy, teens are seldom asked to offer their own thoughts and advice. Many Latino teens say they rarely see or hear themselves in messages and materials designed to prevent teen pregnancy.

This pamphlet puts the voice of Latino teens front and center, and is intended to provide insight into what Latino youth are saying about teen pregnancy and related issues. The pamphlet was created by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy in partnership with the Pathways/Senderos Center, a teen pregnancy prevention program based in New Britain, Connecticut. It highlights ideas and experiences of Latino teens enrolled in the Pathways/Senderos Center.

We hope you find these views and stories helpful and perhaps see your own opinions reflected in these straightforward messages. We would like to hear your thoughts about these topics as well. Please visit www.myspace.com/latino_initiative and let us know what's on your mind.





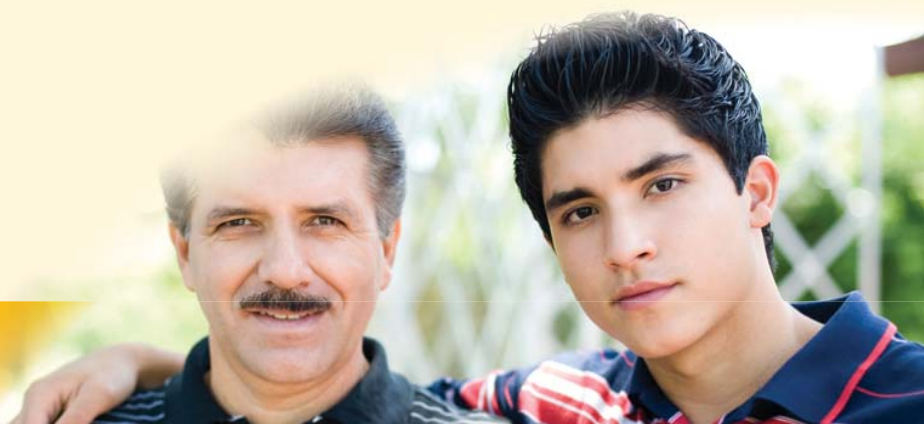
GIRLS SAY: “BE SMART!”*

- 1. Don’t make a bad decision.** Be smart! You don’t have to have sex. But if you do decide to have sex, make sure you know *how* to use a condom, and use one each and every time. No excuses.
- 2. Having sex is a big deal.** You can get emotionally and psychologically attached. Don’t have sex just to have sex.
- 3. You have the right to say “no.”** Remember: you’re in control! Just because you’ve had sex before doesn’t mean you have to have sex every time.
- 4. Think about your goals, future, and education and make a plan.** Keeping yourself on track is hard to do; if you don’t have a plan you could easily get distracted and end up doing something you’ll regret.
- 5. There are a lot of great guys out there, but there are also players who cheat on girls.** Know the difference.
- 6. Don’t go out with a guy just because you’re having problems at home.**
- 7. Pregnancy rarely turns Mr. Irresponsible into Mr. Perfect.** Remember, sex won’t make him yours and a baby won’t make him stay.
- 8. Older boyfriends might expect you to do more than you’re ready to do.** Don’t let anyone pressure you—you can always say no.
- 9. If you want to further your career and life, it’ll be much harder with a baby.** Life won’t be about you anymore—it’ll be about the baby.

* These are suggested tips gathered from four focus groups conducted in December 2008 by The National Campaign with Latino teens enrolled in the Pathways/Senderos Center.

GUYS SAY: “THINK ABOUT IT!”*

1. Having sex to prove that you’re a man is foolish.
2. Being a man means waiting until you’re ready for the lifelong commitment of being a parent.
3. Remember, by making good decisions you’re a role model to your friends and family.
4. Sex has consequences: emotional and physical.
5. You don’t have to have sex, but if you do, make sure you know *how* to use a condom and be sure to use one every time—no excuses.
6. Having sex while drunk or high makes you less aware of your actions.
7. If you have a child too early, it will probably be a struggle to support your family. Don’t just think about today—think about your future and what’s best for your future family.
8. What would you do if you had \$11,000? Buy a car or go to college? Not if you have a baby—it will *all* be gone in a year because that’s the average cost of taking care of a child for one year.





Latino Teens Share Their Stories about Teen Pregnancy and Life Goals

Here are three stories from Latino teens in the Pathways/Senderos Center, in their own words. Only the names have been changed.

David, 16

The reason why it is so important to wait to become a father is because you should have a legitimate job or career first. It is important to have a legitimate job or career because then you can afford the expenses of having a baby, like all the food, clothes, toys, and diapers.

Another reason you should wait to become a father—it goes with the first—is that you have to make sure you finish high school. If you don't finish high school then there is a very low chance of getting a decent job that can support you and your family.

The last reason is a personal reason. The only person that can help you with this one is yourself—you should wait until you are mature enough to have a baby. There are a lot of adults, 30 years old and up, who are still not mature enough to have a kid because they act like kids themselves. You need time to be a kid yourself and then grow up before you have a kid of your own.



Rachel, 18

I was born and raised in Puerto Rico until about the age of eight. Then came to New York and then to New Britain. I was a good kid, rebellious at times, but who isn't? I was a tomboy and, having two older brothers, hanging out with guys was my thing. When I was about 11, I joined Pathways/Senderos, and I loved every moment of it.

I also joined a club where I was the only girl, and I got a lot of male attention. There were these two boys specifically who I liked. One of them, let's call him Shawn, was six years older than me and I liked him so we started "going out." Two or three months into the relationship, he wanted to have sex. Being 12, I went along with it until we almost went all the way. Then every time I would say "no" at the last moment, and he, like any decent guy, would back off and say okay. So one day, we decided that I should sneak out of the house, as usual, and hang out. We started to make out and stuff. When it started to get too far for me, I backed down and was like, "not today." That is when he held me down and raped me. You might wonder why I didn't scream or why I didn't run, and the answer is because I was scared...so scared.

After this happened, I went back to my house and he went back to his. I showered, threw out my clothes and went to sleep. A few days after, I wrote a letter asking him why, and telling him that I didn't want to be with him anymore. I left that letter in a pocketbook at home, where my mother found it. That day when I came home from school, my mom calls me into her room. I see my father there, crying, and my mom pushes me in and locks the door. I guess I said something that I shouldn't have because the next thing I knew, my dad was on top of me, punching me, beating me. I remember my brothers coming in and taking him off me. Then I went to my room and started crying. The next days after that were a blur of fights and tears. My mom took me to the hospital where they checked me out and stuff, and literally kicking and screaming to file a police report. The first time I lied, because I was scared and hurt. I hated him with everything I was, but

still loved him all the same. When I went back, with a heavy heart and tears in my eyes, I told the police everything. In court, I found out that I wasn't the only one he did that to. I cried when he was put in jail—I was only 12, but my pain was so real. It took two years to put him away.

I am now a freshman at the college of my dreams and I am in an extremely committed relationship. Throughout all of my high school years I have seen girls go through abortion, get pregnant, have kids and get dumped after they have had their kids. I have chosen to walk a different path than some of my other classmates because I have a goal in life and as hardheaded as I am, I will not allow anyone or anything to stop me from getting to that goal. Having a baby at a young age is hard. My mom tells me how hard it was. She was a teen mother. Being pregnant is difficult and money doesn't grow on trees. Don't feel forced to have sex because it is your decision, you can always say no. There are always people there to help you with what you are going through, you just have to look. Always remember no matter how bad your past was or your present is, you can get through it and continue living because in the end it will all get better. Take it from me, I know.



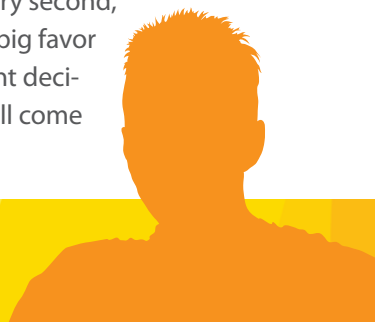
Erik, 16

“Why is it important to wait to become a parent?” What a good question, huh? For me there are many reasons why it’s important to wait. There are many obstacles that you will have to overcome as a parent, from taking care of yourself to realizing how you’re going to support your family. Especially if you’re a teen parent, you have to think about how your future is going to be affected when that baby comes; that’s when life smacks you in your face and makes you realize what you got yourself into.

As a teen, you really start focusing on your future, like what college you want to go to and future goals. But all of that hard work that you put into school and trying to get somewhere and make something out of yourself can be easily ruined with an unexpected child. Just think about how you have focused on your future, and especially your future goals in life. Wouldn’t you like to achieve something in life first? All of that can be easily affected by having a child when you’re not ready.

Also imagine how much it will cost. Supporting a child and the child’s mother will be a lot. Since you made the adult decision to start a family, now you’re going to have to act grown and take responsibility into your own hands. When you have a baby, you have to buy clothes, food, and provide shelter. If your parents won’t let you raise the child in their house, what will you do then? Think about that one, kid! Also think about getting a job, and a good one on top of that. Without a high school diploma, you’re going nowhere big. So think about your entire life going downhill just by making the irresponsible decision of becoming a parent when you’re not ready to be one.

Future goals, life, school, money and great opportunities that are waiting for you can disappear. Remember, life is about enjoying it, but enjoy it right, and in a responsible way. Think before you act. Don’t throw it all away with one little dumb decision. Life is about decisions; every second, you’re making your own decisions. So do yourself a big favor and be serious about your own future. Make the right decision in life and wait to become a parent. Your day will come when that decision will be right for you.



The National Campaign would like to thank the Pathways/Senderos Center for their partnership and for their steadfast efforts in guiding the youth of Greater New Britain away from too-early pregnancy and childbearing. The National Campaign extends its warm appreciation to RoseAnne Bilodeau and Geoff Elterich for organizing the focus groups at the Center, and to the teens who participated in the focus groups and message testing, and who shared their stories through personal essays.

In December 2008, The National Campaign conducted four focus groups with Pathways/Senderos teens to get their views about sex, relationships, and their future goals. The National Campaign has created similar guides about what teens want other teens to know about pregnancy prevention, including *Thinking About the Right Now* and *Our Story, Our Words*.

www.TheNationalCampaign.org

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